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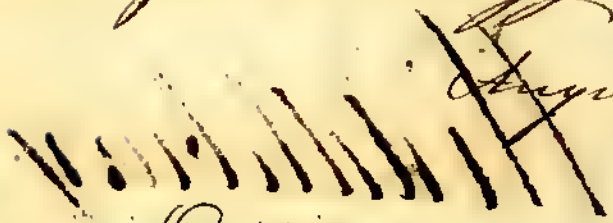


Oration

Delivered at Meetinghouse in Middlebury on the 20th Day of August A.D. 1806. Being the anniversary Commencement of Middlebury College

Oration

Nature in perspective, is uniform and [illegible]
Clothed with the willow and Jessamine [illegible] Zephyr
=tyre, perfumed by its own flowers, & the [illegible]
=in in its majestic pride denoting the thunders
of heaven, form at one view, a pleasing, harmo
=nious scene. But observed in detail, the rose
and the thorn are shaded by the same expression. The
the violet is invaded by the bramble, the regular
=ity of the mountain is interrupted by bold
declivities and frightful precipices, and all
appears with extravagance and disorder. The
planets in their several Orbits, with world
anomaly, now roll coincident, now cross each
others course, approaching on receding con
=trary or opposite. But viewed Collectively,
same Law governs all their motions, the same
Common
[illegible] Centre holds them in their Courses.
Just so it is with man. Individually

by passions, Inclinations and Interests every
=ing with every circumstance of his life, each
for himself holds his momentary Course,
with no common principle to guide or direct
=t. But even in the existence of ages, his nature
is a system. of this system, we know not the
beginning, we see not the end, we must therefore
judge of its probable future (~~return~~) from what
=have been seen. Our Knowledge of Nature is our
observance of effects produced. That which is, is
noticed by us as a fact: but the modus operandi
is never revealed. deceived therefore by ~~mistaken~~
appearances we are very liable to mistakes. But
errors, which are only so in theory are harmless in
fact. I shall therefore hazard an opinion concerning
the nature of man, which if not true is certainly
not dangerous, I shall reason from the past, to the
future, from the progressive Improvement
of man, to his perfectobility. History Clearly
proves, that man has been in a progressive
~~state of~~ Improvement from the earliest times

to the present day. from the rudeness and Ignorance of antiquity man began to emerge, almost by accident. the ~~shepherds~~ Egyptian ~~the~~ shepherds drew the first outlines of astronomy while they protected their flocks, thro' the lonesome hours of the night. the local situation of the phœnicians first taught them the advantages of commerce, and ~~[illegible]~~ enriched easily led ~~to~~ the discovery and adoption of some of the first principles of social life. in the days of Ignorance and barbarity improvements and discoveries always produce the production of casualties. Employment, mode of living, local situation and the like, give the first ~~[illegible]~~ hints, and the mind enlarged and matured by every new discovery is gradually led, by the hand of time to wath in fulness of stature in the paths of philosophy and Truth. Man first became acquainted with his own physical powers. he sooner learned the strength of his arm than his mind. he was sooner convinced of his ability to erect a marble pillar than to ascertain its weight or dimensions, he sooner knew how to vanquish his enemy with the bow and the spear than with the weapons of reason and truth.

Hence in early times the body was cultivated to the neglect of the mind; and to be a man was little more than to be able to perform a daily task in sinking a lake, moving or raising a pyramid. Of this the monumental piles & herculean labours of Antiquity offered sufficient proof. Science, in her progress, apostatized from the animal and vegetable religion of Egypt. Yet Greece had her gods the production of her own country. To her heroes she erected Temples, and paid them divine honours. In Greece the mental faculties of man began to be conspicuous. Her Plato & Aristotle still live. But their minds were rather dazzled with the meteor of imagination & fancy than illuminated by the steady rays of philosophy & truth, witness their endless and unintelligible disputes which perplexed and disturbed the metaphysical world to the present day. Law in Greece began to be a system, and government a science, Rome still improved upon the Grecian model. From deified heroes She passed to imaginary but still imperfect gods, and just before the Christian Aera. we find

the sages believing in the doctrine of a universal & divine providence and in the language of reason & philosophy commending the worship. Immortality & even decorum. But this must be understood as applying almost wholly to Individuals. for altho. Cicero might reason, and Pliny Philosophize, yet the roman people as a nation were but little advanced from the Grecian and Oriental superstitions that Inseparable concomitants of Ignorance. It is the work of ages to bring a nation to walk in the paths of science. But here I anticipate and Important objection to the doctrine of human perfectability, to be drawn from the Christian religion. I engage it shall have its due weight, but it must first be subjected to examination. It will be said that the human mind, although possessing energies sufficient to Improve In the mere arts & sciences yet bound down by the total depravity of man was naturally Incapable of moral Improvement. If so, after Sparta has encouraged theft by Law, why do we find a roman Law prohibiting

it as wrong? why do we see the Grecian prac-
tice of dispatching deformed Children discontinue
in homer? that why do we not see the altars
of the human Gods smoking with human
sacrifices, as was practised among the Cartha-
ginians Phenicians, Scythians and many other
Nations. It will probably be answered, That som-
e of those things so glaringly absurd
and Immoral, the mind was naturally capable
of perceiving and correcting, but there is a poi-
nt in moral excellence beyond which man
could not naturally progress, and to this point
he had arrived at the Christian æra, therefore
all Improvement since that time is to be ascrib-
ed to the Influence of Christianity. for to this
the objection must come on it two or three
If this is true, let us believe it. But if Christi-
anity would have a very powerful effect in
Improving the moral sense of man would
it not seem essentially necessary that it
preserve its own purity? was this the case a sing-
le Century after its promulgation No.

the mind of man not sufficiently enlightened
to comprehend the sublime doctrines of Christ
=anity, Ignorance adulterated the purity of the
Gospel and reduced it to its own standard. In
the first age of the Church springing up the Gno
=tic heresies from a forced Coalition of the
Oriental, Egyptian, Platonic, and Christian
Philosophy
And Indeed during the first four centuries
after the Christian æra Christianity was only
another name for the various modifications
of Platonic, Aristotelic, Egyptian, Oriental & Jewish
=h doctrines in which, in the langu
=age of Mr Emlen the purity and simplicity
of the Gospel was lost in the mystery and Jar
=on of unintelligible systems. Thus
nature would by the experiment and proof
=e the efficacy of religion and reformation
mankind Independent of science, the opened
the floodgates of northern barbarity and overwhelm
=ed the Civilized & Christianized nations one Gen
=eration
in their turn did religion step forth

the Champion of men and rescue his
soaring nature? no she fled, she disappeared,
save only in those monkish cells, where
in the lineaments of mourning nuns
she from the world she lamented the fall of
her pristine excellence, and the
again appear, unless the abominable Impositions
& superstitions of the middle ages can be
called Christianity until in modern
days the revival of letters & philosophy brought
mankind to the standard of reason and prepared the way for
religion to prevail. if this is not so, why
does not religion prevail in its pristine purity
In every country where it is professedly
taught? why, I ask, is there
such preparing for the pure worship of
the Eternal God while thousands of pro-
fessed Christians in Europe & elsewhere
are employed in decking their particular saints or
bowing the knee to marble Statues? Christ

the Image of the virgin ~~Mary~~ may in this house
will gain people worship at? why then a thou-
sands of sincere, penitent professing Chris-
tians do penance all their days at the
shrine of some deputed saint? the answer is at hand,
tis their Ignorance which inspires their piety, &
their unprincipled priests even ready to devour
the sacrifice which is offered to the Idol, maintain
with Industrious Zeal that Ignorance which so
amply pays them their reward. think not that I
attack religion or derogate from its excellence by
making it necessary that man be a reasonable being
before it can address him with success. the truth
heaven gives its panegyric. Instead of being
that mystical incomprehensible something
which, we must call in Implicit faith
to the aid of reason and believe when they are not
convinced, I make it a reasonable system on the
most reasonable of all subjects which smiles on the
brow of Philosophy, and droops on the mantle of

Ignorance. Religion would never have been a check upon the Improvement of man if the mistaken Zeal of its early professors had not woven Cobwebs around it, by means of which, unprincipled and designing men have incorporated themselves with the system that to destroy its abuses, would be almost to destroy the thing itself. It would even have been reasonable had it been left by men where it was left by God. By the term God, to wit in the language of mother I do not mean those mischievous, malignant Phantoms, the patrons of particular nations whether Jews or Gentiles. I do not mean any of those divinities with whom the most exceptionable of mankind have claimed peculiar Intimacy. I do not mean any of those beings on whom venal and unprincipled priests may call to throw the mystic veil of their own vain and contradictory superstitions are the most Infernal Intrigues which have drenched the Earth with human blood from Initio to

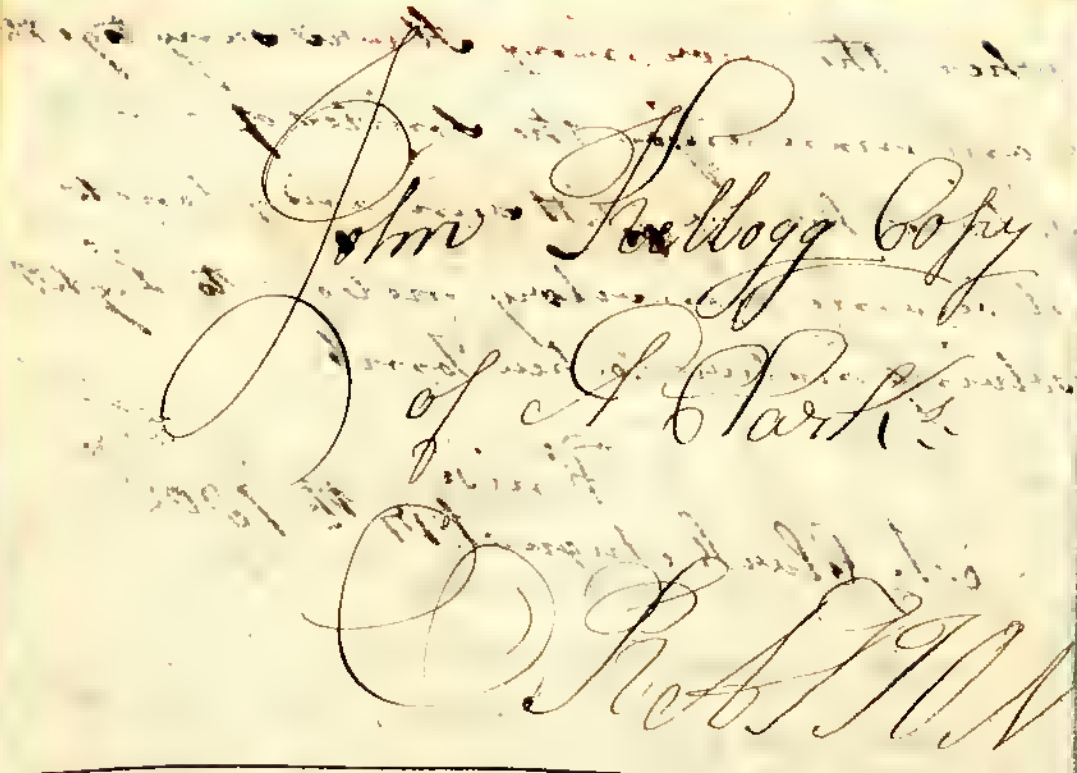
the western Isles, but I mean the God of all
e and of all mankind of whose existence no
mind can doubt without being involved in
the most frightful absurdities but in search of
whom, no unsatisfied Idea bursts, and thought
rolls back on darkness, the doctrine of the per-
fectability of human nature is not of recent in-
dem Invention. It is that to which Isaiah look
ed forward with prophetic Eye, and in the allego-
rical dress of the east has painted in such glowin
g Colours. It is that of which Virgil sang with rapture
allmost bordering on inspiration. It is that on
which Sages both ancient and modern have
contemplated with delight. It is coincident
and perfectly consistent with the Scripture
doctrine of a millennium. If that time even
arrives, so earnestly looked for by Christians,
when Swords shall be beat into plowshares
and Spears into pruning hooks, when the
of the Earth shall learn war no more, man
must either be prepared for it by progress-
ive Improvement or by an Instantaneous

and Incomprehensible metamorphosis, which
is it the most rational to believe? Certainly
the former, for all great events in divine
providence are brought about by means, and these
means are always founded in Nature.
This is a character of man, worthy of the great
author of his nature. it is a character worthy
of himself. It offers to the benevolent of all
descriptions the most powerful Inducement
to engage earnestly in the great work of
progressive Improvement. Soothing beyond
the errors and Imperfections of the present
time it points forward to that day, when man
on having spurned the empire of the world,
All crimes shall cease, and ancient fraud
shall fail, returning Justice lift
aloft her scale, peace o'er the world her
olive wand extend, and white rob'd Innocence
from heaven descend, then, again, shall the
Orisons of nature, rise symphonious,

as when the morning Stars sang to gether, and man enjoy the Smiles of [illegible] propitious heaven, till sun and planets shall become transitory meteors to Light dissolving nature to new Tomb

Finis

A. Clark Augst 17th 1806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